

Understand My Sickness

by Rufescent

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****Note****: The summary and idea is from fellow fanfiction author EmmaKSkywalker.

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><p>"I'll never understand my sickness. Save yourself_, from a life full of lies and a heart full of pain and sorrow."_

My Darkest Days: "Save Yourself"

* * *

><p>He should have been raging, hissing and spitting with hate at the treatment. Another shock ripped across his skin, leaving tingling pricks, and Anakin felt his back arch involuntarily but he did not cry out. It hurt, almost enough for him to reach hesitant fingers towards the cool blackness already brushing against him with feather-soft fingers. The watery gentleness sung to him like a

siren's call, enticingly flirty.<p>

He remained impassive, fisting his hands and avoiding the beckoning darkness as his blue eyes flashed defiantly. He had made a promise. Anakin Skywalker relaxed against the magnetic cuffs and allowed his feelings to drip down his skin as its own type of cold comfort.

"Why will you not give in to your anger? Your hatred?" Dooku asked curiously, his severe face leaning closer to the boy. When the brat only stared back with vacant eyes, the Count smiled disdainfully and began circling him. Anakin tried to twist against his cuffs, craning his neck so he could track the Sith Lord. Dooku stopped behind him, facing the boy's back and successfully staying out of his sight.

Anakin Skywalker was enigma to the Sith Lord. After training him in the ways of the Force for four years, the urchin still refused to accept the Dark Side. He used it in brief lapses, of course, but never fully to the extent that it would darken his soul and embolden his power. Count Dooku honestly could not understand how Skywalker was of any use to them; why his Master was so set on keeping him under his wing. The child was powerful in the Force but still untrained and inexperienced. Easy enough to rectify, if only the boy would actually put forth any effort.

At first, the Count wondered if he was using the wrong motivation. The slave boy would undoubtedly desire freedom, having been denied the right for his entire life. Apparently not. Skywalker seemed to care little for freedom. Oh, he had tried many times to run away but to no avail. Dooku had been forced to continuously explain that his freedom was contingent on pledging himself to the ways of the Sith, hoping that the offer would seem easy enough and then the Count could finally continue doing more important things with his time instead of watching a dim-witted child. Even lightening did little to solve the behavior. The brat seemed to have found a way to phase out most of the pain, a habit most likely picked up during his gritty childhood.

The Count pressed his hand between the boy's shoulder blades and took immense pleasure at the sharp intake of breath and squirm of discomfort. So the wounds were still open. Good.

This time Anakin cried out when the lightening zapped over his body, travelling across his flesh in branch-like flashes. Both could smell the burnt hair and skin, and Anakin choked a little as he convulsed.

He was glad he would soon be rid of the brat. His patience had come to an end after the most recent escape attempt and continuous refusals to even consider using his bottled rage. Dooku could feel through the Force the immense ocean of hate lapping at Skywalker from a deep well of thick, syrupy bitterness that should have already drowned him whole. Yet the Tatooine slave held his face above the depths by just a miniscule margin, still breathing.

"Why?" Dooku asked again to Skywalker's back.

Just as he expected, no answer came except the grunts and hisses of pain. Dooku sneered, pulling his hands into the folds of his cloak as he glided out of the red-carved cell. He turned his face only

slightly, so the boy could see his shadowed profile as he paused by the door. "You no longer have any use to me. There will be no more chances."

And then Anakin was alone in the dim cell, his head bowed and body twitching from the after-effects of the electricity. His tight-lipped smile heavy with sinister emotions was only meant for the dusty hematite walls.

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><p>Anakin was slapped awake by an armored Geonosian. He had barely blinked the sleep out of his eyes before the containment field holding him in place was suddenly released. Anakin steadied himself quickly before he could tumble face-first into the dirt. Two Geonosians flanked him, and the third pushed its blaster against the small of his back. They clucked unpleasantly at him, and Anakin scrunched up his nose, glad he couldn't understand the guttural language.<p>

"Yeah, yeah," he muttered, stumbling from a forceful push. Ducking his head, his eyes flicked around from underneath his blond fringe as he took in the deep taverns and crevices as the group headedâ€| wherever they were going. Probably to Dooku. Anakin surreptitiously pulled at his Force-inhibitor binders, wondering if he could take the armed, winged bugs in a purely physical fight. Probably the two, he decided, but he wouldn't be fast enough for the third blaster-ready Geonosian. He wasn't that desperate. Yet.

Anakin slowed down a little, hoping to catch glimpses into some caved cells in the opposite hallway. Unfortunately, his guards didn't let him, and he was pulled forward before he could see anything. Scowling, Anakin considered just darting inside a tunnel to get away before dismissing it only a millisecond later. Geonosians normally lived inside those holes so he certainly wouldn't get far at all.

As Anakin continued his trek with the three hovering insectoids, he carefully tuned out their chatter since it was providing no useful information. He tried to focus on the Force, but it was left to mostly just flutter around him, present but frustratingly unavailable. Oddly, he could still sense some faint twinges of enjoyment. For him to be able to access the cosmic power with the cuffs on must either mean there were mass feelings of happiness in a concentrated setting or one person was powerful enough to broadcast its feelings that loudly. Of course, Anakin could also just be better than the inhibitors, but since he had already failed fourteen times in running away, he knew his skill was far from phenomenal. Why the excitement, then?

Within the next few moments, the teenager understood where he was headed. The Petranaki arena. As the air cooled the further downward they went, Anakin chewed on his lower lip, eyes darting left and right. Only four years of training with the Force wasn't enough for him to be prepared to take on the fanged non-sentient beings that the Geonosians smuggled on planet. He could maybe (hopefully) take on a

Reek and live, but an Acklay?

Well, kriff. Anakin tried to settle the heavy dread in his gut as the group arrived in a small squared cave with an arched opening into the arena._ Chuba_.

May the Force be with me, Anakin thought sardonically, trying to use the Jedi phrase ironically but instead coming off more genuine than he would care to admit. _Kriff, _he added for good measure.

He was manhandled forward and into a hovering wagon before it moved into the bright sunlight that reflected off the red rocks. Anakin squinted against the light, trying to find strategic places he could flee so he wouldn't die. There were none, of course, considering it was an open arena meant for gladiator fights. If this was Dooku's plan of getting him to use the Dark Side, it wasn't going to work. The acidic blackness already clung to his skin like karking _sand_, but it hadn't gotten his soul yet and wouldn't _ever_ if he had anything to say about it.

As his wagon slowed near the closest pillar, Anakin realized he wasn't as alone as he had thought. There were two Humans tied in the far end spires, with an empty one standing between him and the girl dressed in dirtied white. He ignored the curious hum of familiarity towards the strangers, turning his head to glare into the stadium stands and then the general direction where he hoped Dooku was watching. The Geonosians were cheering loudly, their leader clucking at them about something from the balcony, and Anakin braced himself for the opening drums, paying no heed to the surprise he could _finally_ feel from the two other fighters.

The Force being with him again was a great feeling. Anakin just hoped he could stay alive to still be able to use it.

Metal screeched as the gates were lifted, and Anakin felt all his false bravado deflate as an Acklay clunked into the open after the quadruped Reek. He must have made an embarrassing squeak because the Human male turned to face him directly, radiating a strange mixture of disbelief, skepticism, and concern. The latter was probably because Anakin was sure his face was bleached white. At least the girl seemed like she was going to have a fighting chance, already twisting out of her handcuffs to climb up her own pillar.

She had a good idea. Anakin tugged experimentally at his chains, breathing through his nose as he watched the Nexu bound out with a high-pitched purr, leaping and killing one of the Geonosian handlers.

Kriff, he repeated.

"Just relax," the man told him, only a hint of anxiety coloring the practically cool tone. He glanced over for a brief second before he faced the Acklay tottering forward. The Jedi (Anakin was sure of it now, trusting his senses) advised, "Concentrate."

Anakin grimaced. Easier said than done. He shifted, pulling at the chains again almost desperately. At least, he consoled himself selfishly, the Acklay seemed to like the Human Jedi and not him. Maybe the Force was on his side today.

The drums quickened and then there was no time for thought. Anakin could only vaguely hear the Acklay stabbing at the Jedi's pillar with its claw-like legs. He distantly hoped the man lived. The Reek was now the sole focus of the teen's attention and he made himself relax enough to look at the situation with a moderately (barely) clear head.

The beast was lumbering forward, its heavy body making deep indents in the sand. Anakin held his breath as it got closer, ready. Just when it was about to ram into his pillar, he pushed himself up into a fast back flip, landing around the Reek's neck as his boots pushed against the two large cheek horns. Yes! Safely out of the sand and not crushed to death yet.

He risked a hateful, blue-eyed glance into the display chamber where he could feel the Count was observing. He quickly looked away, though, when he felt eyes on the back of his head. The Jedi spared him a look full of something he couldn't discern before the Acklay tried another piercing claw and the man was forced to deftly roll under and around the fast stabs.

An anguished cry from the girl tore Anakin's attention in the other direction, over to the closer pillar. He patted the side of the Reek, trying to calm it despite understanding that this kind of aggression was almost impossible to help. He tossed his chains around the dinosaur's neck like a make-shift harness and continued trying to persuade it to go towards the long-tailed Nexu and girl. The Reek apparently did not agree, trying to shake him off as it ran as fast as it could with its heavy weight _in the other direction_ before smartly stopping abruptly. Anakin grunted at the momentum, but remained firmly on its back. _Nice try_.

Over his heart-beat, he could hear a rumbling shake and, panicking, he watched as the Acklay threw itself against an execution pillar. The rock crumbled and broke at the ends, falling loudly against the sand with a small quake.

That Jedi is kriffing amazing. Anakin stared in unbidden awe as the dusty reddish-brown hair poked up from behind the now-horizontal spire. Dooku probably wouldn't have been able to last this long against an Acklay, he thought smugly with some bizarre sense of pride.

The Reek under him jerked again and the teenager tried to regain his breath. Surveying his surroundings and the state of the other two Humans, Anakin quickly did the math. Save the girl. Then save the Jedi. Ask them for a ride off of here before Dooku can change his mind or try to kill him personally. And then? Well. He'd think about that later.

Kicking at one of the cheek horns as he pulled the chain harness, Anakin successfully (yes!) directed the Reek towards the bright girl and circling Nexu. The Geonosian handlers really didn't like him on the natural-herbivore, following him and his stomping Reek. _Well too bad_.

Anakin allowed himself a congratulatory grin as the Reek thundered into the four-eyed Nexu with all the force it had, grunting. The teenager angled his face upward, straining against the dimming sunlight. He called, "Jump!"

The girl's face twisted a little and he clearly read the mistrust in the way her eyes pinched and mouth flattened. But quite quickly she seemed to understand her situation and was already in the air before he could open his mouth again. Anakin hurriedly used the Force to soften her landing so she wouldn't completely disable herself at the impact. He felt her wrap her arms around his waist, pressing against him, and Anakin hoped she didn't hear his hiss of old pain over the cheers and growls of battle.

"There's Obi-Wan!" she told him and he followed her fingers to the Jedi still facing off against the Acklay. Cracking the chain, he forced the Reek along.

The girl shouted for him and the Jedi must have heard because he turned on his heel and sped over to them. Anakin got a good two-seconds to see the Jedi up-close before he directed his attention back to the arena. Yanking at the chains, he tried to guide the Reek to the side-lines. Hopefully that would give them a better advantage and maybe they could steal one of the metal weapons he had briefly seen leaning near one of the gates.

"Stop!" the Jedi commanded and Anakin obeyed, pulling at the reins just as seven droids rolled in to surround them, opening and loading their weapons.

Anakin was struck with a bottomless realization of unfairness. He cursed Dooku with all the worst kind of Huttese words he knew and then some. He had been so close.

As one droideka moved closer and the Reek shuffled back, Anakin considered the suicidal attempt of just rolling off the dinosaur and hoping he was fast enough to outrun the laser fire. This had been the closest he had been to freedom, and it was pathetic enough that he hadn't even gotten confirmation that the two would help him off this dusty planet if they had lived.

"Don't do anything rash," the Jedi cautioned. Anakin twisted in his seat, trying to get a good look at the man but a sudden series of snap-hisses widened his eyes and he jerked back to stare at the colorful sabers thrumming in the stands.

Jedi reinforcements? Thank the Force. Anakin sagged a little and then hastily straightened again when the girl grunted in surprise. He tried to send her a sheepish smile and was victorious if her gentle, understanding gaze meant anything. Automatically his eyes fell to the Jedi, who was also looking at him with narrowed, blue-green eyes. Uncomfortable, Anakin turned back to stare into the crowd of fleeing Geonosians.

"Take the Reek forward," the Jedi said. Anakin nodded, tightening his hold and directing the beast ahead. As it stomped along towards the charging Jedi, Anakin pulled it to a stop half-way. A Human Jedi tossed his compatriot the hilt of a lightsaber and only chanced a brief distrustful look at Anakin before he continued to charge the battle droids.

Repressing the feelings that he was evildirtyimpuretainted Anakin offered to cut the man's chains and then just decided he was tired of seeing the suspicious looks and plucked the saber from his surprised,

loose hands. The chains dropped to the sand, burnt. He was apparently too slow in handing the lightsaber back because the Jedi snatched it away with unneeded force accompanied with a sharp glare.

Fine. Anakin huffed and slid off the calmed Reek with a glare of his own.

As the Reek groaned in displeasure and shook the remaining passengers off, Anakin increasingly felt out of place as the girl fired off her blaster (when did she acquire that?) and the Jedi swung his blue lightsaber in fanciful arcs to redirect the enemy fire and cut down droids. Anakin almost wished he had his own saber with him, but the maroon-red would certainly not have helped anyone.

Hesitating, Anakin shuffled his feet as he glanced around at the fighting. It took him three seconds before deciding that he was going to hide until the battle finished and hope to all of Tattooine's dead gods that the Jedi would win and accept his plea for a ride. As he ducked under the blaster fire, he listed the facts of his plan because no way was he going to let one of his notoriously bad decisions muck up his closest bid for freedom.

One, he was not ready to face Dooku, and the Sith had hopefully fled when the throng of Jedi appeared. Two, the Jedi came here in mass, so they must have available transport for one more body. Hmm, maybe he could just steal a ship? No. Best to not tick off the Light users when they already hated him and had the power to do something about it.

Anakin shuffled inside the square, holding area similar to the one where he got onto the hovercraft. It could have been the same one, for all he knew. The sounds of battle cascaded around him but it was muted enough that he could relax against the wall and simply listen to himself breathe. Dooku's Force signature tingled against his awareness and he cursed, his eyes still closed. That meant the man was still nearby. How much pleasure could watching a battle really be? What a maniac.

He slid down the rock wall. It was hard to dismiss the desire to fight, but it was the right decision. The adrenalin was starting to wear off, and Anakin didn't know the Jedi enough to know how to fight alongside them, especially if they refused to trust him.

A few moments passed with the battle still raging outside. Dooku sure was taking his time to leave. Force! Maybe Anakin should actually try to steal an aircraft; he did not have the patience for this. Just as he pulled himself up, the heavy sound of droid artillery echoed in the arena. Anakin sucked in hot air and threw himself in the open archway, staring. Super battle droids were marching around the corralled Jedi. Nononono.

Dooku's snobby voice sounded around the arena, and Anakin allowed himself a growl of rage since he was not being manipulated into joining the Dark Side at the moment (and why couldn't that be a never?).

"Surrender, and your lives will be spared," the Sith finished magnanimously.

The Jedi viciously refused and Anakin felt fear pool in his stomach.

He should do something since he wasn't inside the circle. What? What could he do?

There was a tense standoff. Anticipation and danger sizzled hotly in the Force. It felt like it was actually burning him, singing his clothes and skin like Sith lightening.

"Look!" the bright girl in white said, her face tilted upward.

Anakin's first thought was that it was a futile, last-ditch attempt to distract the Sith and droids. Then his second thought became nonexistent as he stared at the ships of reinforcement arriving, the rumbling of engines enough to provide evidence to the girl's claim.

As the Jedi (and girl) headed into the lowered assault carriers, Anakin started hyperventilating, wishing he had more time but knowing this was going to be his only way off Geonosis. No way was he going to be alone with the mass droids and Dooku!

Stumbling back into the sand, Anakin weaved around marching battle droid and heavy blaster fire until he practically landed on top of the one dark-skinned Jedi (he was the one who refused Dooku?) in his haste.

"Hey, Hi," he babbled, speedily helping the Human up and missing the incredulous expression on his face. "So, um, I need a ride. Please, please help me. I can pay you back, I swear."

So that might have been a stretched truth, but he could pay them back in time. Just, not immediately since he had no money.

Anakin had managed to tighten his shields when he had hid away from battle and hoped that the trickles of leaking darkness would be easily enough dismissed. During the battle he had been too preoccupied to bother with shielding, as it still took up a lot of his concentration. He just hoped it would be enough to get off this planet and away from Dooku.

The Jedi looked like he was about to refuse, though his face was still open in surprise. Who the kriff are you? Anakin unnecessarily translated in his head as waited for his last hope to die a horrible death. He should have tried to convince the red-headed Jedi or the girl instead even though that carrier was farther away.

"Allow the boy passage, we will."

Anakin fastened his eyes onto a short, green being with wispy white hair and large eyes. Nodding his head in pure thanks, he hurried into the carrier and shoved himself in a corner so he wouldn't get in the white-armored men's way. Almost out of the woods, but not yet, he told himself.

"If Dooku escapes, rally more systems to his cause, he will," the green Jedi emphasized with a significant look as soon as they were in the air. When red blaster fire hissed around the ship, the Jedi ignited their sabers and swung against the attack.

Anakin pinched the bridge of his nose, curling himself up into a

smaller ball. How much safer was he on a military carrier vessel than just attempting to walk to one of their ships? No going back now, he supposed. Anakin forced the continuing sounds of battle out his awareness, trying to relax and maintain his tentative shielding.

As the carrier landed, the dark-skinned Jedi snagged Anakin's arm with a tight grip and dragged him off the ship.

"I'm going to walkâ€¦" he had interrupted whatever the Human was going to say, paused, and then glanced behind him. Nodding, Anakin continued more confidently, "Back there towards your ships."

He turned quickly, pulling out of the hold, so the Jedi wouldn't have time to stop him before his attention had to be focused on the battle. The green Jedi had already asked to be taken elsewhere, and so Anakin nodded once more to himself and ran as fast as he could in the opposite direction of the fire, explosions, and swinging lightsabers.

He used the Force to guide his steps to safety. Soon enough he would be far away from the dust of Geonosis and the crazy, manipulative Sith Lords.

I have a good feeling about this.

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tbc

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****Quick Notes - in the order of this chapter**:**

(1) Anakin really is powerful in the Force. I think the inhibitor cuffs on any other Force-sensitive would block out even the mass feelings of euphoria, but not for him since, yeh know, he was created by the Force itself.

(2) Anakin does not get dragged through the sand, like in the movie. (Sorry if ya'll wanted that.) For some reason, I think this not-Sith!Ani would have been far more desperate to hold onto his moderately safe perch.

(3) I don't know if Anakin used the Force in canon to soften PadmÃ©'s jump, but I'm assuming he did because _ouch_, her crotch would hurt if she kept that momentum at impact. He must have. There is no other way.

(4) Anakin is going to be terribly anti-social and lacking any know-hows of how to talk to people. So basically exactly as he was in canon whenever he flirted with PadmÃ©. Such a dork.

(5) I'm actually really disappointed I didn't get to chop off Ani's arm. He got his mechanical hand in such an honorable manner, and it just seemed so useful (and packed full of symbolism, that too). I get that it was definitely a traumatic incident that probably scarred him more than the movies ever showed, but I just think it's pretty cool. Unfortunately (for me, not Anakin), in this AU he still has both flesh arms. (So farâ€¦)

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So this is my test chapter to see if I should continue it into a full-blown multi-chapter story. If I get enough interest, I'll hopefully continue writing. (I'll probably still continue it even if people hate this, because I love _Star Wars_ AUs and there should be moooooore.) I have not written out the next chapter, but I do have an idea of what I want; so in translation: the next update will _not_ be soon.

Anyway! Please review! Shall I continue? Is it too boring? Excited to see what the differences will be in this new universe? Let me know in that cute little box down there. Thanks for reading thus far!

End
file.